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DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR G/AIAG (BOGESS/WINN/STUDZINSKI)

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TAGS: KFLU AORC TBIO EAGR FAID PREL GR

SUBJECT: AVIAN INFLUENZA: GREECE IS READY TO RESPOND

REF: SECSTATE 92335

¶1. (SBU) Summary: EconOff delivered reftel points to Ioannis Pierroutsakos, Chairman of the Hellenic Center for Diseases Control and Prevention (HCDCP) and to Sotiris Tsiodras, an expert on infectious diseases at the Greek Ministry of Health (MOH). Both officials outlined a clear and articulate strategy for the Greek response to a potential Avian Influenza (AI) outbreak. If a serious outbreak occurs, HCDCP said foreign assistance in surge capacity would be critical in order to respond to a larger-than-predicted incidence of AI in Greece. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Chairman of the Hellenic Center for Diseases Control and Prevention (HCDCP) Ioannis Pierroutsakos and his infectious diseases expert Sotiris Tsiodras at the Greek Ministry of Health (MOH) told EconOff in a September 22 meeting that the GOG had a well-organized national emergency preparedness plan to respond to an Avian Influenza (AI) outbreak. Pierroutsakos said that the MOH, the Ministry of Rural Food and Development, and the Greek Veterinary Services worked closely together on a plan that was developed in 2004 with guidance from the World Health Organization (WHO). Following a 2006 outbreak of AI in wildfowl, the GOG took all safety and pre-cautionary measures to deal with the outbreak, including securing the perimeter around the outbreak and designating specialized units in the local hospitals.

¶3. (SBU) To prepare for the migratory season, the Ministry of Rural Food and Development randomly tests several species of wild birds to determine whether they have a strain of AI. There are two designated laboratories assigned to test and determine if the samples contain a strain of the virus. The Pasteur Institute examines the samples in Athens and everything in the southern region, while the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki has purview over all the areas North of Athens. Pierroutsakos said that Greece has a positive relationship with Turkey and its other neighbors on this issue.

¶4. (SBU) Pierroutsakos said that the GOG will send several representatives from the MOH, the Ministry of Rural Food and Development, and the Veterinary Services to the upcoming Avian and Pandemic Influenza Conference in Sharm el-Sheikh in October. Those representatives will include Deputy Minister of Agriculture Constantinos Kiltidis, President of the National Foundation of Agricultural Research (NAGREF) Spiro Kyriakis, Director General at the Ministry of Health Theodore Papademetriou, and the Director General from the Veterinary Services of Greece.

¶5. (SBU) Although the GOG has a cohesive and organized plan to respond to AI, Pierroutsakos and Tsiodras said they were concerned that a new virus strain, mutating in a similar method to human influenza, might spread. Despite this potential threat, they were optimistic that their domestic collaboration and cooperation with its neighbors on this issue would continue. Nonetheless, both officials highlighted that they would need outside assistance to

increase response capabilities if the outbreak is greater than anticipated.

SPECKHARD